

# Emotional Intelligence and Sports Performance Among Malaysian Ethnic

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**Abstract** Athlete must recognize one's emotions, as well as their opponents and teammates emotions, in order to perform well in sports. For athletes, higher emotional intelligence has been linked to higher performance in sports. Previous studies showed that only scant research done on emotional intelligence in sports compared emotional intelligence among the athletes. It was also evident that comparing emotional intelligence on different ethnic, whom come from different culture, was very limited. The aim of this research was to compare the level of emotional intelligence among different ethnic of athletes and their sports performance. It sought to correlate the relationship between emotional intelligence and sports performance of athletes from different ethnics (Malay, Chinese and Indians). Emotional intelligence scale (EIS) and Sport Performance Questionnaire were used to collect the data. The sample consisted of 217 athletes, who competed in Majlis Sukan University Malaysia (MASUM), also known as Malaysian University Sports Council. The result of this research showed that overall Chinese athlete scored higher in emotional intelligence and Indians, the lowest. The result also showed that the existence of a strong positive relationship between emotional intelligence and sports performance. Sports psychologist and coaches can use the findings to apply coping strategies to enhance emotional intelligence among Indian and Malay athletes.

**Keywords** Emotional intelligence · Sports performance · Ethnic

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## 1 Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) is defined as ‘the ability to employ, monitor, perceive, and manage emotions within one and in others’ [1]. Furthermore, according to [2], emotional intelligence is ‘the ability to understand, recognize, and effectively use our feelings, which make it easier to manage the people around us and ourselves’. This definition consists of five components such as motivating ourselves, managing them, knowing our emotions (self-awareness), recognizing emotions in others (empathy) and handling relationships.

In light of these definitions in sport, emotional intelligence can be defined that an athlete being able to motivate himself/herself, to control his/her feelings (towards his/her teammate, the opponents and supporters, referee, the managers, managers of the opposing team and other similar factors), to direct controlled feelings in a positive way, to establish positive and effective communication, to develop communication skills, to gain control over stress levels and utilize this control [3]. In other words, an emotional intelligent athlete is skilled in four areas, such as understanding, identifying, using and regulating emotions [1].

In the sports context, emotional intelligence is important for athletes. For athletes, higher emotional intelligence has been linked to higher performance in sports. Research done by Perlini and Halverson [4] showed that emotional intelligence of hockey players was higher and this contributes to their success in the super league. Athlete must recognize one’s emotions, as well as the opponents’ and teammates emotions, in order to perform well in sports [5]. Therefore, emotional intelligence plays an important role in influence one’s ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands, challenges and pressures [6].

Many studies showed that emotional intelligence resembles success even though not many studies done on these athletes. The study done by Bar-On [6] and Swart [7] showed that those students who scored higher in emotional intelligence are those students who are good in academic. Both studies showed that students, who were able to manage their emotions, were more success to solve problems related to personal and interpersonal, which was considered as an important element to success in studies.

The main problem regarding this study is when previous studies showed that only scant research was conducted on emotional intelligence in sports compared to emotional intelligence among the athletes [8–11]. Furthermore, comparing emotional intelligence on different ethnics, who come from different culture is very limited. Culture may be defined as the changing patterns of learning behaviour and the products of learning behaviour (including attitudes, values, knowledge and material objects) that are shared by and transmitted among the members of the society; hence, it is an ongoing social heritage [12].

Research of [13] on Whites, Blacks and Hispanics showed that female Hispanics scored the highest in EI and Female-Whites scored the lowest. Similarly, research of [14], comparing emotional intelligence on Whites, African Americans, Latino-Hispanics and Asian Americans, shows a very contradictory results.

Whitman et al. [15] had done an interesting study using emotional intelligence test on 910 job applicants. The purpose of testing emotional intelligence on job applicant was to select the best candidate, since EI determined success in job. The result showed that the level of the emotional intelligence was highest on the Whites, followed by Hispanics and Blacks.

In Malaysia, Malay is the largest ethnic (50.4 %) population, followed by Chinese (23.7 %), indigenous (11 %), Indians (7.1 %) and others (7.8 %, especially from East Malaysia) [16]. Even though, all of them staying in the same country but each of the ethnic followed their own culture. Sometimes, it is hard to believe that they remain in the same country, but their way of living differs dramatically from the others. Since many studies showed that there is a very strong connection between culture and emotional intelligence [17], we are not sure how far culture of each ethnic influences their emotional intelligence.

## 2 Literature Review

Emotional quotient (EQ) is one of the methods to measure a person's ability to be successful in their life. According to the theories of brain function, a high EQ means of someone's self-aware, self-confident and able to navigate through trying emotional times. EQ is often directly to the degree of success in job and personal relationships. A few studies had been proved that a person with better emotional intelligence typically has more success in personal and interpersonal interaction compared with people who have less effective ways of dealing with emotions [18, 19].

The concept of emotional intelligence has been put to use in various psychological research settings in recent years and has been the main focus of many different theories throughout the literature [20–22].

Besides that, several researchers in the past introduced and developed the concept of emotional intelligence as a type of intelligence that includes abilities, competencies and skills and that enables a person to identify emotions, be able to solve emotional issues, as well as to manage and control own emotions [6, 9, 23]. Furthermore, it is commonly acknowledged that an athlete's emotions play an integral part in their performances [24]. We often hear that an athlete or team is 'playing on emotion' or that on any given day, feelings such as aggression may be up or down during the competition. However, measuring the emotion that underlies these observable behaviours or accessing them when needed by the athlete is less simple than seeing them in action during the performance stage [1].

Based on the health setting, researches suggest that participants with higher emotional intelligence reported better psychological well-being, social interactions, physical health and self-actualization [18, 19, 25, 26].

### 3 Aim of the Study

The aim of this research was to identify the level of emotional intelligence among Malaysian athletes of different ethnics. It aimed at comparing the level of emotional intelligence among different ethnic of athletes and their sports performance. It sought to correlate the relationship between emotional intelligence and sports performance of athletes from different ethnics (Malay, Chinese and Indians).

### 4 Method

This survey was conducted using a set of questionnaire namely, emotional intelligence scale (EIS) [27] and Sport Performance Questionnaire to collect the data. The 33 items of EIS assesses six factors: appraisal of own emotions, appraisal of others' emotions, regulation, social skills, utilization of emotions and optimism. These six factors represent a person's emotional competence, which is very important in the performance and interaction with others. The EIS is a self-report measure of emotion that provides an estimation of the level of emotional intelligence.

Appraisal of own emotions is the ability of self-awareness and expressing the feelings in appropriate way. It also includes the feelings when making decisions and solving problems. Appraisal of other emotional assess is the ability to appraise an emotional states experienced by team athletes, coaches and audience. Regulation of their own emotions assesses the management strategies that may be used to alter an emotional stability. Social skills refer to the ability to change the emotions of other people by general strategies such as showing empathy towards others, cooperation, satisfying relationships and helping others. Utilizations of emotions concerned with the adaption and awareness of the influence of emotions on a range of different performance outcomes. Optimism is the positive beliefs and look at the brighter side regarding the future towards general outcomes (e.g. improved happiness, good things to happen, doing well).

Besides that, Sports Performance Questionnaire, which contains 15 items evaluated athletes' performance based on their confident, satisfaction, enjoyment and concentration level.

The sample consisted of 217 athletes, who voluntary participated in this study. The sample was drawn from athletes who competed in Majlis Sukan University Malaysia (MASUM) or Malaysian University Sports Council.

**Table 1** Respondents' profile

Emotional intelligence	Malay	Chinese	Indian
Appraisal of own emotions	3.2212	3.3451	3.1718
Appraisal of others' emotions	2.7181	3.2217	2.8731
Regulation	3.6781	3.1721	2.5461
Social skills	2.4739	2.5811	2.7614
Utilization of emotion	3.4732	3.7418	2.7811
Optimism	3.7895	3.5541	3.0008

## 5 Result

### 5.1 Respondents' Profile

Frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation are presented in Table 1, which shows the overall results of the respondents' profile. The profile of the respondents described the ethnics, gender, age, universities and type of sports taken part. Based on the ethnic, the majority of the athletes belong to Malays ( $n = 105$ ) since they are the majority in Malaysia. The second largest ethnic in Malaysia is Chinese. There are 65 Chinese athletes. Indians are the lowest ethnic in Malaysia. There are 47 Indian athletes.

The mean age for overall respondents was 21.71 years old (Table 1). The age of male varied from 18 to 27 years, where the mean age was 22.07 years old. The age of females ranged from the minimum of 18 to the maximum of 25 years old. The mean age for female respondents was 22.01 years old.

The variable 'types of sports' are gathered through the studies. This variable is categorized into seven sports. The highest respondents involved football (20.28 %), followed by basketball (18.89 %), swimming (15.67 %), silat (14.28 %), track and field (12.90 %), hockey (9.68 %) and takraw (8.30 %).

Based on universities (Table 1), the majority of the respondents were from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), followed by University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), University Utara Malaysia (UUM), University Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), University Teknikal Melaka, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and University Perlis Malaysia (UNIMAP).

### 5.2 Mean of Emotional Intelligence

The results (Table 2) showed that Malay athletes were higher in regulation ( $x = 3.678$ ) and optimism ( $x = 3.789$ ). While Chinese athletes were higher in appraisal of own emotions ( $x = 3.345$ ), appraisal of others' emotions ( $x = 3.345$ ) and utilization of emotion ( $x = 3.345$ ). Furthermore, Indian athletes were higher in social skills ( $x = 2.761$ ).

**Table 2** Mean of emotional intelligence based on the categories of athletes ethnic

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
<i>Ethnics</i>				
Malay	105	48.39		
Chinese	65	29.95		
Indian	47	21.66		
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	75	34.56		
Female	142	65.44		
<i>Age</i>				
Male			22.07	2.18
Female			22.01	1.89
Overall			21.71	1.53
<i>Types of sport</i>				
Football	44	20.28		
Basketball	41	18.89		
Swimming	34	15.67		
Silat	31	14.28		
Track and Field	28	12.9		
Hockey	21	9.68		
Takraw	18	8.3		
<i>Universities</i>				
UiTM	55	25.34		
UKM	35	16.13		
UUM	30	13.82		
UPSI	28	12.91		
USM	27	12.44		
UTM	23	10.61		
UNIMAP	19	8.75		

### 5.3 Level of Emotional Intelligence

One-way ANOVA showed high significant differences of levels of emotional intelligence among categories of ethnic athletes,  $F(2, 217) = 15.001$ ,  $p < 0.01$  (Table 3). Ethnicity of athletes represented those who belong to Malay, Chinese and Indian race.

Post Hoc Tukey's test (Table 4) showed that the level of emotional intelligence of Indian athletes was lower than Malay ( $p < 0.05$ ) and Chinese athletes ( $p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, the level of emotional intelligence among Malay athletes was higher than Indian athletes ( $p < 0.05$ ) and less than Chinese athletes ( $p < 0.05$ ). In addition, the level of emotional intelligence of Chinese athletes was higher than Malay ( $p < 0.05$ ) and Indian athletes ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 3** Level of emotional intelligence based on categories of athletes' ethnic

Categories according to ethnics	Mean	F value	p value
Malay	20.7789	15.001 <sup>a</sup>	0.000
Chinese	23.4321		
Indian	18.8129		

<sup>a</sup>  $p < 0.01$

**Table 4** Post hoc Tukey: level of emotional intelligence among categories of athletes' ethnic

Categories according to ethnic	Malay	Chinese	Indian	N
Malay		<sup>a</sup> (2.221)	<sup>a</sup> (3.312)	05
Chinese			<sup>a</sup> (2.619)	65
Indian				47

<sup>a</sup>  $p < 0.05$

**Table 5** The relationship between the emotional intelligence and sports performance among athletes

Subject	Sports performance
Emotional intelligence	0.018 <sup>a</sup> (0.000)

<sup>a</sup>  $p < 0.01$

### 5.4 Correlation of Emotional Intelligence and Sport Performance

The correlation coefficient of 0.018 was noted between the emotional intelligence and sports performance in the evaluation of 217 athletes, which is significantly ( $P < 0.01$ ). In other words, the positive relationship existing between these variables is statistically significant (Table 5).

## 6 Discussion

### 6.1 Mean of Emotional Intelligence

The mean of elements of emotional intelligence showed that Chinese athletes were higher in appraisal of their own emotions, appraisal of others' emotions and utilization of emotion.

Malay athletes were higher in regulation and optimism, while Indian athletes were higher in social skills. A few researches indicated it is normal that different ethnics showed different levels of certain elements of emotional intelligence because of the cultural differences. Research of [28] showed that African Americans, aboriginals and Asians scored lower in regulation of emotion, compared to

European Americans. We can be concluded that the differences in the element of emotional intelligence related with the cultural difference. Hence, one can use EIS to predict the cultural difference between ethnics.

## ***6.2 Level of Emotional Intelligence***

Overall the result showed that the athletes in the Chinese categories exhibit higher level of emotional intelligence than Malay category athletes, whereas Indian athletes showed the lowest levels of emotional intelligence. In Malaysia, no research has been done involving these three categories of ethnics, so the findings of the current research could not be compared with that of previous researches. Anyway, culture is the main factor that determined the level of emotional intelligence among different ethnics. According to [29], people differ from one another in their abilities to interpret and the use emotional information in each culture. Therefore, the level and element of emotional intelligence may differ from culture to culture. A few comparison researches done on emotional intelligence between North Americans and East Asians showed that the East Asians groups obtained lower EI scores compared to Northern Americans because of practicing the contradictory cultural values and beliefs [30].

According to [31], behaviour, which is in one culture considered as clever or intelligent called to be regard as stupid or nonsense in another culture. For example, item 21, 'I have control over my emotions'. In Malay culture, one believes that everyone should control over their emotions, but in Indian culture, it is encouraged to express their emotions rather than controlling it. For example, during funeral, Malays are forbidden to cry and should accept the God's will to take one's life. But, in Indian and Chinese culture people are encourage to cry, to express their feelings of sadness in losing their love ones. A few questions in EIS [27] related with non-verbal cues, for example item no. 5, 'I find it hard to understand the non-verbal messages of other people', item 'I am aware of the non-verbal messages I send to others', and item 25, 'I am aware of the non-verbal messages that other people send'. If we compare the usage of non-verbal cues in the daily behaviour, Malays are using it more compared to other ethnics. For Indians, non-verbal message sometimes can be considered as lack of manners. For instance, to answer 'yes' or 'no' is considered as normal in Malay culture by shaking the head but it is considered as lack of manners in Indian culture. In Indian culture, one should open his mouth to say 'yes' or 'no'. Therefore, most probably, this cultural behaviour may influence their answers.

Furthermore, item no. 28, 'When I am faced with a challenge, I give up because I believe that I will fail', we can find that Malays and Indians have the tendency to give up very easily compared to Chinese. Many Malays believed that when you face a lot of challenges in attempting a goal, it shows that God does not accept it or in other words, one does not have the 'rezeki' or blessings. Therefore, in Malaysia, Chinese is considered successful in business compared to Malays and Indians.



### ***6.3 Correlation of Emotional Intelligence and Sport Performance***

The result showed the existence of positive relationship between emotional intelligence and sports performance. It is not surprising since emotional intelligence strongly linked with job performance, quality of relationships, and well-being [32, 33]. Therefore, emotional intelligence of athletes enhances their sports performance. The higher the emotional intelligence, the higher their performance in sports is.

In sports, it is necessary to be sensitive with non-verbal cues among team members. Success in team sports such as football and hockey depends how far team members can communicate with each other using non-verbal cues. Therefore, a few items like 'I find it hard to understand the non-verbal messages of other people', 'I am aware of the non-verbal messages I send to others', 'By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing', 'I am aware of the non-verbal messages other people send' show that the more knowledgeable athletes on non-verbal cues, the more success in sports is.

Besides that, a few other items in the EIS have a strong connection with sports performance. For example, 'When I am faced with a challenge, I give up because I believe I will fail'. Athletes who are easily giving up and have a very low self-confidence, its impossible for them to succeed in sports.

Furthermore, controlling the emotions is very important for an athlete to succeed in sport. Therefore, a few items that related to control emotion are considered important for success in sport, for example 'I have control over my emotions'. For success in sports, it is very important to control emotion. There are many challenges in sports like the nasty behaviour of the audience, the irritated behaviour of coach, the provoking behaviour of opponents and so on. If athletes fail to control their anger, anxiety, worry and shame, it is impossible to succeed in sports.

## **7 Conclusion**

The result of this research showed that overall Chinese athletes scored higher in emotional intelligence and Indians, the lowest. The result also showed the existence of exist a strong positive relationship between emotional intelligence and sports performance. Sport psychologists and coaches can use the findings to apply coping strategies to enhance emotional intelligence among athletes of Indians and Malays.

Future research should explore the reasons of Indians athletes scored lower in emotional intelligence. Future research also should attempt to test the emotional intelligence based on different level skills of athletes, for example elite or national, state, district, university and school levels. Research needed to be done to find out the influence of socio-economic factors on emotional intelligence of athletes.

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